

What is claimed is:

1. A latent cross-linking thickener or rheology modifier composition comprising a polymeric thickener which has been modified to comprise at least one functionality capable of forming cross-links.
2. The composition of claim 1 wherein said cross-linking occurs after the thickener is applied to a substrate.
3. The composition of claim 1 wherein said modification comprises at least one functionality selected from the group consisting of acetal, aldehyde, epoxy, hemi-acetal, silane, diacetone acrylamide, aziridine, blocked isocyanate, amino, chlorohydrin, hydroxy, imine, oxazoline, acid, and vinyl functional groups.
4. The composition of claim 1 wherein said polymeric thickener is a natural thickener selected from the group consisting of alginates, cellulose and their derivatives, guar, arabic gum, kelgin, starch, and mixtures thereof.
5. The composition of claim 1 wherein said polymeric thickener is a synthetic polymer thickener selected from the group consisting of polyvinyl alcohol, cationic solution polymers, anionic solution polymers, non-ionic solution polymers, amphoteric solution polymers, acid swellable emulsions, hydrophobically modified acid swellable emulsions, alkali swellable emulsions, hydrophobically modified alkali swellable emulsions, hydrophobic ethoxylated urethane, inverse emulsions, hydrophobically modified inverse emulsions, and suspension polymers.
6. The composition of claim 1 wherein the ratio of the thickener to the functional groups is from 0.5-30 weight percent
7. The composition of claim 1 wherein said cross-link formation can be triggered by air drying, oven drying, infra-red drying, microwave, temperature adjustment, pH adjustment, evaporation, oxidation, ultra violet, or electron beam.
8. A coating composition comprising the latent cross-linking thickener of claim 1.
9. The coating composition of claim 8 comprising from 0.01 to 30 weight percent of said cross-linking thickener.

10. A method of thickening a composition and providing improved film properties comprising
- a) combining the composition of claim 1 into a formulation;
  - b) applying said formulation to a substrate; and
  - c) triggering the cross-linking reaction.